

Warren R. Briggs

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Warren R. Briggs was an American architect who worked in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He was a "native of Boston" and trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. His work was greatly influenced by H. H. Richardson.^[1]

He was inventor of the baseball catcher's mask.^[2]

In 1899, he authored *Modern American School Buildings--Being A Treatise Upon And Designs For The Construction of School Buildings*.^[3]

"In 1909, in his book *Modern American School Buildings*, Warren Briggs comments:

As to the exterior, it seems to me that a school building should show some idea of architectural proportion and symmetry; because a structure is designed for simple and homely purposes it does not follow that it must be unsurpassingly ugly; yet how few of the village schools that dot the pleasant landscape of our country are pleasing to look upon? It is true that they have the simplest of lines and are usually built of the homeliest materials; but even with these drawbacks, well-studied lines and carefully proportioned masses combined with the plainest materials may in skillful hands make a village school building a thing of beauty.

"[4]

He designed the Connecticut Building in the World's Columbian Exposition^[5]

Buildings he designed which survive and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places include:

- Fairfield County Courthouse (Bridgeport, Connecticut), 172 Golden Hill St., Bridgeport, CT, built in 1888^[1]
- Fairfield County Courthouse (Danbury, Connecticut)^[6]
- Locust Avenue School, Locust Ave., Danbury, CT
- Seaside Institute, 299 Lafayette Ave., Bridgeport, CT
- One or more buildings in Walnut Hill District, New Britain, CT
- One or more buildings in Barnum-Palliser Development Historic District, Bridgeport, CT^[7]

References

1. ^{a b} D. S. Plummer (September 8, 1980). "National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination: Fairfield County Courthouse" (<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/82004376.pdf>) . National Park Service. <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/82004376.pdf>. and *Accompanying 10 photos, exterior and interior, from 1980* (<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Photos/82004376.pdf>)
2. [^] Famous Bridgeportians (<http://bridgeportintheknow.com/famous.htm>)
3. [^] Google book (http://books.google.com/books?id=cmbaA6sX21kC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Warren+R.+Briggs&source=bl&ots=LKODEgkz0V&sig=G8cn_MbNt3EqLw142xudpbexRqI&hl=en&ei=auAaTPapCYOBIAfIy42uCG&sa=X&oi=book)
4. [^] Chestertown Historic District NRHP nomination (http://www.livingplaces.com/NY/Warren_County/Chester_Town/Chestertown_Historic_District.html)
5. [^] Architects (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma96/wce/architects.html>)
6. [^] www.jud.ct.gov source (<http://www.jud.ct.gov/external/kids/history/postcards/Danbury.htm>)
7. [^] Barnum-Palliser Development Historic District (http://www.livingplaces.com/CT/Fairfield_County/Bridgeport_City/Barnum-Palliser_Development_Historic_District.html)

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Street and a large modern-style professional office building west of lot #32. Properties to the south of those on Hart Street are primarily of later date than buildings in the Walnut Hill Historic District, and for the most part, do not stylistically or specially relate to this historic district.

There are several prominent "critical" buildings which serve to identify the Walnut Hill Historic District and provide visual continuity. In essence, the more subtle and less-distinguished buildings tend to relate visually to the more outstanding examples, thus providing a sense of cohesion and uniformity which helps to set the district off from the surrounding neighborhoods. The "critical" buildings are most dominant because of their exceptionally fine architecture, especially large scale, or high degree of visibility. Among the most important are the structures on the four corners of High, South High, and West Main streets; the School Administration building (former New Britain Normal School, #21 Hillside Place); the David Nelson Camp House (#9 Camp Street); the State Armory (#285 Arch Street), and a select group of houses in the south block of Camp Street. Among the category of "critical" are included buildings of various architectural styles, strongly related by design, that range from the mid-nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth. All of the above buildings possess nearly complete integrity of original design. In all cases, alterations and modifications, as they exist, are not especially detrimental to the architectural composition.

The category of "contributory" buildings includes all historic structures that have been modified to the extent that the original design is compromised. In the case of the Walnut Hill area, the most common violation of integrity has been the addition of synthetic siding or the enclosure of porches. In most cases alterations to the "contributory" buildings are not irreversible. In all cases the "contributory" buildings relate to the dominant architecture and scale of the Walnut Hill area, and enhance the character of the Walnut Hill Historic District. Taken together, these buildings are quite crucial since they form a visual "backdrop" for the most important buildings. In one major instance, the visual continuity of the Walnut Hill Historic District is carried from north to south by a transitional block along Camp Street between School and Grand streets. The total cohesion of the Walnut Hill Historic District is reinforced by the Camp Street block, and the absence or loss of that block would sever the design continuity of the entire district.

The so-called "not essential" buildings include those which have poor visual or design relatedness to the balance of their surroundings. "Not essential" structures include those buildings which do not correspond either in scale, facade treatment, or architectural style. In no instance, however, is this category indicative of structural weakness, blighted conditions, or unsuitable living standards.

The Walnut Hill Historic District typifies the residential styles of professional persons in New Britain during the nineteenth century. Houses were often both homes and businesses to craftsmen, tradesmen, educators, and others. Also included are two school buildings and a college campus, three churches, two libraries, an armory, and a post office that all date from the late 19th to early twentieth centuries. The predominant architecture in the Walnut Hill Historic District, however, dates from the mid-to-late 19th century. There are no buildings with a confirmed construction date earlier than the 1840's, and there are few important buildings constructed after the close of the First World War. There is a great diversity of architectural styles within the Walnut Hill Historic District, although the scale and massing of most buildings is quite uniform and

contributory to the district character.

The earliest architecture of the area is in the style of the [Greek Revival](#), circa 1830-1840. Several examples of this style occur throughout the Walnut Hill Historic District. The finest is at #25 South High Street, the Smith-Flagg-Middlemas House (1830). Among other notable Greek Revival houses are #24 Grand Street and #42 Walnut Street.

Several houses express the influence of the [Gothic Revival](#) (1840-1860's). Although the Greek Revival style was felt to symbolize the nation's founding of democracy, the Gothic (including the richly embellished Victorian Gothic of the 1870's) was also a popular style. Outstandingly Gothic in character is the Timothy Wads-worth Stanley residence at #1 Hillside Place (1860). This house was constructed by a member of the family that eventually founded the Stanley Tool Works, at present New Britain's major industry.

The [Italianate](#) style (1850-1860) is especially well represented. Two important buildings are #9 and #10 Camp Street. David Nelson Camp, a nationally prominent educator, built #9 Camp Street for his residence between 1850 and 1855 in the Italianate style with Gothic Revival porch detailing.

[Queen Anne](#) and Eastlake influences (1876 through 1900) are found in the Walnut Hill Historic District. One important example of this style is #15 Hillside Place, the Mitchell House.

[Second Empire](#) influence in the Walnut Hill area usually consisted, of the addition of a Mansard roof to an otherwise flat-roofed Italianate house. A more elaborate example is located at #18 Hart Street.

The State Normal School, #27 Hillside Place (1881-1883) was founded in New Britain in 1850. This was the first school in Connecticut (and sixth in the nation) to specialize in teacher education. The school building is an eclectic blend of Eastlake, Queen Anne, and Second Empire influences. It was designed by Warren Briggs, a Connecticut architect. In this building was founded what is probably among the first American kindergarten. The normal school occupied this commandingly situated landmark until 1927. Today the building serves as administrative headquarters of the public school system.

The Neo-Classical styles characterize the buildings at High, South High, and West Main streets. A blend of residences and institutions, the area shows the influences of two local architects, William H. Cadwell and William Brooks. Brooks designed the Hartford Municipal Building, an especially outstanding Neo-Classical building. The oldest structure at this intersection is the house of William H. Cadwell built for his bride in the French Chateau/Queen Anne/eclectic style (1890) at #130 West Main Street. William Brooks designed the New Britain Institute (library) (1901), at #8 High Street in yellow brick with Greco-Roman terra cotta ornamentation. In 1930, Brooks designed the adjacent Hawley Children's Library as a companion building in English Tudor Gothic. The 1910 Neo-Classical Post Office and two [Gothic](#) churches complete the balance of this urban space. This cross-read typifies the conscious attempt of 19th century leaders to blend styles as complements to a balanced total visual effect. Each building seems set apart as if on a pedestal exhibiting an individual design, yet a pleasing visual unification of Neo-Classical styles is created.

April, 1995 Addition

The four apartment buildings located at 57-61 Court Street (also known as the Courtland Arms), 53 South High Street, 59 South High Street, and 70 Walnut Street are now classified as contributing to the significance of the aforementioned district. The buildings were all constructed within the established period of significance for the district, 1840-1930; they represent architectural styles similar to other residential, commercial, and institutional buildings within the district; and they all retain sufficient integrity to contribute to the significance of the Walnut Hill Historic District.

Significance

The Walnut Hill Historic District of about 145 buildings spans the period 1840 to 1930. It characterizes the styles of architecture which were popular when New Britain emerged as an industrial city. This area, the Walnut Hill Historic District, is unique in New Britain, for it retains its original intention — a blend of institutions, offices, and houses. It contains one of the largest clusters of historic buildings in any New Britain neighborhood. Relatively little new construction in recent years distorts the pleasing 19th century character. The Walnut Hill Historic District exemplifies New Britain's and America's 19th century urban life style.

New Britain emerged as an independent community during the mid-19th century. Although the city's parent communities of [Farmington](#) and [Berlin](#) were well established during the late 1600's and both were extensively involved in trade by 1800, New Britain was not even established as a parish until 1754. New Britain became an independent town and borough in 1850, following separation from Berlin. It was incorporated as a city in 1871.

Originally New Britain was an agricultural community producing necessities for local consumption. However, with the influence of Berlin, local blacksmiths and others began producing small metal articles that could be merchandised by peddlers as side-lines to the tinware trade. From these early attempts developed a specialization in metal manufacturing (tools, builder's hardware) that by 1900 established New Britain as the "hardware city of the world." This pattern of development from production by peddlers to major metal manufacturing is typical of several communities of the greater Naugatuck Valley, including [Naugatuck](#), Waterbury, and [Bristol](#).

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[See Map](#)

Street Names: [Arch Street](#), [Camp Street](#), [Cedar Street](#), [Court Street](#), [Emmons Place](#), [Grand Street](#), [Hart Street](#), [High Street](#), [High Street South](#), [Hillside Place](#), [Main Street West](#), [Parsons Place](#), [Prospect Street](#), [Rogers Place](#), [School Street](#), [Walnut Street](#)

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